

Innovation and technology must be core business

The aged care sector has always evolved, and must keep doing so

My journey through aged care spans some 30 years, and I've seen the sector improve in leaps and bounds during this time.

The Standard and CARE aggregate models or CAM & SAM funding, RCS, ACFI and now AN-ACC is how one can mark time and progression throughout the years.

One could also use the evolution of the Commonwealth inspection and auditing process from a basic inspection model to the four accreditation standards, and in more recent times maturing to the eight we have today, and now the 'revised' standards coming in 2023.

Or one could spend time looking at the documentation systems, from paper to the first rudimentary clinical management systems, and later the addition of medication management systems to the ever elusive aged care fully integrated management systems.

The sector has always learnt to evolve, forced in response to the ever-changing regulations and legislation, with the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety as a driver.

The pace of evolution over the past couple of years has been more intensive. Providers are faced with a harsh reality, adapt or leave the sector.

Since 2019 we have been in the perfect storm, with COVID-19 battering down our doors, and the press hot on its heels, plus a swathe of new legislation and regulations, and workforce challenges.

Providers able to weather the storm successfully are those with flexibility and agility within their culture, accepting what is before them and adapting, not hesitating, not 'waiting and seeing' but accepting and preparing.

To do this, innovation and technology must be at the core of these organisations. Innovation is the response; technology is the means. However, innovation can be 'hamstrung' by technology.

If the technology is too rigid, too prescriptive, it cannot 'bend in the wind'. Technology that relies on user group approvals and developer testing and retesting before version release does not allow for creative and reactive innovation; this kind of technology is like an oak in the wind 'it staps'.

Technology needs to respond to the creative solution-driven innovator; if it cannot, innovation is stymied and restrained by its technologies.

As a General Manager of Quality and Innovation for Signature Care, which operates homes in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, I've had the good fortune over the last five years to work with such a system, Acredia Care, a true integrated aged care management system.

Five years ago, this management system featured solutions around clinical reporting, HR, document management, quality and safety (including a continuous improvement plan, feedback and hazard register, staff incidents, an Intranet and a staff self-service portal). This early was so good that it won an Aged Care Better Practice Award.

Today, Acredia Care is unrecognisable from its former self. The platform has more features, is more powerful and robust and, most importantly, can adapt instantaneously to change through its customisation features.

The system now has a competitive Clinical Management System and a Medication Management System with approved eNRMC abilities. Notably, the Clinical and Medication System is built on its users' knowledge and skills, making it the most intuitive system; it is 'for the people by the people'.

Acredia Care is what it is today based on the organisation's collective innovation. The platform is used by many other providers apart from Signature Care, and is responsive to their style of innovation, different in all but the core foundations. It is responsive to an organisation's strategic directions, risk appetite, and taste for pushing the limits and, of course, its limitations. In short, Acredia Care adapts organically to the demands asked of it.

My role is not only about ensuring that Signature Care meets its legislative corporate and care obligations, it is also about ensuring that Signature Care remains agile, able to move confidently and without effort through the maze of existing, new and future compliance obligations; Acredia Care has made all the difference.

Today, technology and innovation are crucial to success in the aged care sector. Equally important is having a governing body that trusts and invests in its innovators, tasked with the responsibility to keep the residents, staff and the organisation safe and compliant while delivering a high standard of care.

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